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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Pope Benedict XVI in Israel

Key stories in the media:

HaQaretz reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to promise during his meeting with President Obama at the White House on Monday that Israel will remove all restrictions to the movement of

foodstuffs into the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, four senior EU officials sent a letter to FM Avigdor Lieberman and DM Ehud Barak, calling on them to immediately and permanently open the crossings into the Gaza Strip for humanitarian aid.

Noting the chaotic passage process involving the proposed 2009-2010 budget, the media reported that the government approved it this morning, 26-4 (the Shas ministers), with a 6.5% across-the-board. The media reported that the defense and finance ministries, as well as IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi and the Union of Local Authorities, sharply criticized the proposal.

Major media quoted IDF Intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin as saying yesterday before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that Tehran is very close to obtaining the technology necessary to build nuclear weapons, but that the chances are very low that Israel's enemies will start a major war on its borders. Yadlin: Slim chance of war. HaQaretz quoted Yadlin as saying that Egyptian efforts have failed to curb arms smuggling to Gaza.

Media reported that two mortar shells were fired last night at the western Negev. The Jerusalem Post reported that, fearing an increase in infiltration attempts by terrorists along the border with Egypt, the IDF's Southern Command recently began constructing a barrier along a 40-km stretch of the border near Gaza -- between the Kerem Shalom Crossing, at the southwest corner of the Gaza Strip, and the Israeli border town of Nitzana to the south.

All media cited the results of an IDF probe that the Canadian-born IDF soldier killed during a raid in the West Bank town of Bir Zeit was killed by a bullet fired by this company's deputy commander.

HaQaretz reported that police detained its correspondent Amira Hass as she left Gaza, where she had been living and reporting for the past few months. Hass was arrested and taken in for questioning immediately after crossing the border, for violating a law forbidding residence in an enemy state.

HaQaretz quoted visiting Pope Benedict XVI as saying yesterday that he is committed to true, durable reconciliation between Jews and Christians. Media reported that Israeli criticism of his Yad Vashem speech surprised the Vatican. This morning leading media reported that the Pope called for a sovereign Palestinian homeland after arriving in Bethlehem at the start of a one-day visit to the West Bank.

Channel 10-TV reported that restrictions on journalists and official attempts to influence coverage during the Gaza conflict led to Israel's Partly Free status on the U.S.-based NGO Freedom House's annual Freedom of the Press Index. HaQaretz reported that Israel ranks eighth on the list of 52 so-called "electronic police states," according to a report prepared by the U.S.-based company Cryptohippie, which develops data security products. The list of "electronic police states" is led by China, followed by North Korea, Belarus, Russia, and then England, Wales, the U.S., and Singapore. The report defines an electronic police state as a country that uses technology to record, organize, search, and distribute evidence against its citizens.

Leading media reported that the Health Ministry announced yesterday that passengers arriving in Israel from the U.S. and Canada who have a fever will undergo a medical examination upon arrival to determine whether they have swine flu. Until now, only passengers arriving directly from Mexico were subject to the ministry directive.

The Jerusalem Post reported that last week Leslie Cunningham, the wife of the U.S. Ambassador, hosted the Lions of Judah, an organization that empowers Ethiopian immigrant women through projects that help them to realize their potential. Mrs. Cunningham was quoted as saying: I love the fact that the Lions of Judah is an organization of women empowering women.

1. Mideast:

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Summary:

In a QletterQ to President Obama, Eldad Yaniv, a former adviser to Defense Minister Ehud Barak, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QYou can get into a fistfight with Israel and leave it bleeding, but you can't force peace down its throat. If you want Netanyahu to yield, you have to find the key to the hearts of the Israeli public.

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in HaQaretz: Q[Netanyahu] is going to Washington with the support of the public and the politicians. The trust he will gain in the future will depend on the results of his meeting with Obama.

Europe correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QNetanyahu, ostensibly the master of PR, is failing to pick up the frequency on which the Western leadership is currently broadcasting.

Block Quotes:

II. "Letter to Obama"

In a QletterQ to President Obama, Eldad Yaniv, a former adviser to Defense Minister Ehud Barak, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/13): QThen-prime minister Yitzhak Shamir thwarted [George H.W.] Bush and Baker's plans, and Netanyahu could do the same. You can get into a fistfight with Israel and leave it bleeding, but you can't force peace down its throat. If you want Netanyahu to yield, you have to find the key to the hearts of the Israeli public. Remember when during your last visit to Israel, Ehud Barak and Tzipi Livni took you on a helicopter tour to show you how narrow the country is? Do you still remember the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and Qassam-stricken Sderot? They are at the heart of our narrative, just as much as the nuclear reactor in Dimona is. That's the essence of the Israeli paradox. The same Israelis who enabled Netanyahu's rise in the last elections also want peace and security. For that reason, they agree with you that Jerusalem needs to be divided, and a Palestinian state must be created. They, just like you, dream of peace. But these Israelis feel you are shaking the earth under their feet. Suddenly you've got your hooks on our nuclear reactor, making overtures to Hamas, and bowing to the Saudi King. These Israelis think you might take us for suckers.... Show Netanyahu and us a plan whereby the Arabs get their state, the Palestinians forgo the right of return to Israel, and the land and Jerusalem is divided in two. But get us guarantees of security and recognition from 57 Muslim countries.... Offer us such a deal, and you we will earn our admiration. Israel will follow you with the conviction of [elite IDF] Sayeret Matkal commandos who followed [Ehud] Barak in the dark of the night, when he was their commander.

II. "Is It Him or Is It Us?"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in HaQaretz (5/13): Q[Prime Minister NetanyahuQs] maintenance of the cease-fire with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the TerritoriesQ leaders' criticism of him for Qcontinuing the freeze on settlement activityQ only serve to bolster the still unproven belief that he has become more moderate.... But until proven otherwise, this seemingly centrist positioning is an illusion. Netanyahu's views are much closer to those of Lieberman than those of Barak, and the extreme right has decisive weight in the coalition -- even if one assumes that Lieberman is a pragmatist who is prepared to compromise, since that still leaves Shas, Habayit Hayehudi [the Jewish home,] and most of the Likud Knesset members.... Nonetheless, Netanyahu looks like he is in control and enjoying his comeback, while keeping any boorish behavior in check. He is going to Washington with the support of the public and the politicians. The trust he will gain in the future will depend on the results of his meeting with Obama.

III. QNon-Starter

Europe correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (5/13): QEvery international leader who has recently spoken on the Middle East issue has emphasized the establishment of a

Palestinian state. It is important to understand that this is a joint effort: Merkel, Brown, Obama, Sarkozy, they are all coordinated and repeating the same words intentionally. The target: Netanyahu. The Israeli message is not getting through because Netanyahu, ostensibly the master of PR, is failing to pick up the frequency on which the Western leadership is currently broadcasting.

Talk of Qself-governmentQ sounds like colonialism for beginners, like a proposal to establish a protectorate modeled after the Bantustans. Rhetoric focused on Qimproving the Palestinians' living conditions,Q which completely ignores their national demands, is perceived as paternalistic arrogance stemming from a sense of superiority. Simply put, Netanyahu gives the impression that he thinks the Palestinians can be bribed -- that they have no existence as a people, and no right to self-determination. They are natives who need protective development, under the auspices of an Israeli empire, which will toss them a few glass beads. In substantive terms, this is an outmoded approach. The assumption that improving the Palestinians' economic and social situation will lead them to abandon ideas of national self-determination is fundamentally flawed. On the contrary, the history of the 20th century shows that improving the economic situation is often a critical catalyst for a national liberation struggle. Economic stability that creates a strong middle class and a sector of educated young people serves as an effective recipe for a revolution. Netanyahu surely knows all these historical lessons; after all, he is the son of an eminent historian.

IV. QSmelling Weakness

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (5/12): QThe first 50 days of NetanyahuQs government passed without exciting external events -- neither Qassam rockets nor terror attacks nor a dramatic turnabout in the economic situation. All the governmentQs disasters came from within.... The man who formed the government is also the man who decides its budget. Many of our prime ministers turned their own survival into the main thing, from a certain point. This is happening to Netanyahu too soon: Only 50 days in power, and not much is left: No plan, no vision and no ambition, save the ambition to survive. The man who turned Qif they give, theyQll receiveQ into his political motto very soon reached the point where he is giving and giving, so long as power is not taken from him. It is sad. Nikita Khrushchev, who ruled the Soviet Union 50 years ago, said about President Kennedy after their meeting in Vienna in 1961 that Kennedy was Qtoo intelligent and too weak.Q He was wrong about Kennedy, but until he realized his error, the Soviet Union and the United States were on the brink of world war. Netanyahu should pull himself together. It is not only his 30 ministers who are scrutinizing him. So are friends and enemies, from Washington to Tehran.

12. Pope Benedict XVI in Israel:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QThe Pope's visit shows that there is no real dialogue between Israel and the Vatican, and that it is difficult to erase centuries-old wounds.

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QNot, Heaven forbid, that the Pope's unfortunate speech should not have been criticized -- but is that all there is? What about his other statements, the respect he has shown us?

Block Quotes:

11. "A Missed Opportunity"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (5/13): QOne word unsaid can sometimes be more damaging than thousands of words uttered. This is what happened two days ago during Pope Benedict XVI's speech at Yad Vashem. The thorough preparations for his visit to Israel ... evaporated as if they did not exist thanks to a speech that was missing one word -- QsorryQ.... Benedict is not as attuned

an internationalist, capable of rallying the masses, as his immediate predecessor, John Paul II, was. His organizers should have made more of an effort in understanding the audience which the pontiff addressed. His important statements condemning anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial lost their potency because of his lukewarm remarks at Yad Vashem. The Pope's visit shows that there is no real dialogue between Israel and the Vatican, and that it is difficult to erase centuries-old wounds. It is clear that logistical preparations for such a visit are not sufficient, and that it is vital to conduct diplomatic dialogue over the content of the public aspects of the visit, so as to prevent mishaps and ensure a successful trip. On his trip to Africa, Benedict set off a storm by what he said. In Jerusalem he set off a wave of disappointment by what he did not.

II. "We've Gone Too Far"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (5/13): QWe do not have many friends in the world, and the Vatican has never had its picture taken next to the image of

Benjamin Zeev [Theodor] Herzl. It took decades of hostility until the Vatican, following the Oslo Accords, agreed to establish diplomatic ties with us. The Vatican wields influence over more than one billion people in the world, whose opinion of us is important to us. Not, Heaven forbid, that the Pope's unfortunate speech should not have been criticized -- but is that all there is? What about his other statements, the respect he has shown us? For quite some time, it appears that we have lost a sense of proportion in almost every area of our lives. Perhaps we can return to our senses? A bit, just a bit. Full disclosure: This writer was involved to a certain degree in the preparations for the Pope's visit to Israel.

CUNNINGHAM